

Mission San Francisco de la Espada, Church
Berg's Mill Community
San Antonio
Bexar County
Texas

HABS No. TX-320-A

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MISSION SAN FRANCISCO DE LA ESPADA,
CHURCH

HABS No. TX-320-A

Location: Berg's Mill Community, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas.

Present Owner: Roman Catholic Archdiocese of San Antonio.

Present Use: Church.

Significance: The church of the Espada features a typical design derived from the plans used by the Franciscan Fathers in their construction of mission buildings.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Circa 1778; the church may have been only partially completed. In 1856 the church was rebuilt and made larger, but by 1858 it was in a disintegrating state, except for its original front facade which was left intact. In that year the church was rebuilt again, using better construction methods.
2. Original and subsequent owners: See History section of Mission San Francisco de la Espada, HABS No. TX-320.
3. Alterations and additions: In 1909, following Father Bouchu's death, the church was restored without the north transept. In 1911 the church was extensively renovated and the roof that had been erected by Bouchu in 1883 was replaced. The interior was also rebuilt with a new brick floor, wood ceiling, doors, and windows. In recent years there has been considerable restoration and reconstruction of auxiliary structures.

- B. Historical Context: See Mission San Francisco de la Espada, HABS No. TX-320.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The facade is notable for the upper arched openings where the bells are hung and the entrance arch.
2. Condition of fabric: Good, though in a restored condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Approximately 25 feet wide and 65 feet long.
2. Foundation: Rubble and lime mortar.
3. Walls: Random rubble sandstone laid in lime mortar. Walls are carried up to form a parapet for the roof.
4. Structural system, framing: Load bearing masonry walls; wood framed roof system.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: One of the distinguished features of this building is the unique arched doorway which is located in the center of the front (east) elevation. The profile of the opening is that of a multifoil arch of three scallops and at the point where the cusps are usually found there are reversed right angles. The arch ring, composed of voussoirs, has a crude fillet molding framing both the intrados and extrados. The monolithic impost-piers have molded imposts and bases and a plain center field outlined by channels. The double wood doors are paneled in the "colonial" style and are of recent date.
 - b. Windows: Window openings are symmetrically located in the side walls of the church. They are narrow vertical rectangles spanned by simple rubble semicircular arches. Windows are wood casement sash, five lights per panel, set in wood frames. Lunettes fill the arched openings above the simple wood transom bar.
6. Roof: Present construction of the flat roof is unknown. Carved stone water-spouts are located in the parapet wall.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: Simple cruciform plan consisting of nave, transepts and chancel.
2. Flooring: 6" x 6" unglazed quarry tile set in Portland cement, all modern.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are plastered (modern). The ceiling is supported by 6" x 8" yellow pine beams resting on plain hammerbeams. The ceiling is made of rough planks of varying widths.
4. Trim: The altar has molded rail and newels and turned balusters, all apparently modern.

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5. Hardware: All hardware is modern and is of the period "style."
6. Lighting: Electric fixtures.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The church is oriented east and west and faces east. It was originally integral with the west mission compound wall. It faces onto a large open area that was originally the mission plaza.

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The San Antonio project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in the summer of 1968, and was made possible with funds from HABS and two sponsors, the Bexar County Historical Survey Committee and the San Antonio Conservation Society. Under the direction of James Massey, Chief of HABS, the project was carried out by Wesley I. Shank (Iowa State University), project supervisor, and by student assistant architects, Charles W. Barrow (University of Texas); Les Beilinson (University of Miami); William H. Edwards (University of Illinois); and Larry D. Hermsen (Iowa State University) at the HABS field office in the former Ursuline Academy buildings, San Antonio. John C. Garner, Jr., Director of Bexar County Architecture Survey, did the outside work on the written documentaries. Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the written data in 1983, for preparation of transmittal to the Library of Congress. Dewey G. Mears of Austin, Texas took the documentary photographs of the San Antonio structures.

The 1983 photographs of the church are part of the 1983 San Antonio Missions project, which was sponsored by the Southwest Regional Office, National Park Service. John Lowe of the HABS/HAER Office, Washington, D.C., took the photographs.